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ABSTRACT

This keynote speech addressed the growing concern among educators, parents, and the community about the instances of extreme aberrant behavior by school children and young adults. Understanding and responding to children or young people who present disturbing behavior is difficult since no two individuals act in the same way, nor are the reasons for their difficulties necessarily similar even if their behavior is similar. If children and young people have negative feelings about themselves, and their close contacts, then some respond by even more negative actions. Early intervention is vital before they withdraw further or indulge in increasingly disturbing antisocial actions. Education has an important role by providing opportunities for success and promoting positive attitudes and actions, but so have other agencies. Attention should also be given to the local environment, the home environment, the aspirations and expectations of young people, and to the youth culture, some of which is promulgated through social events and the media. Effective education is essential in meeting the very challenging needs exhibited by young people. Within schools these pupils require a curriculum which is broad and seen by them as relevant. It requires effective teaching and learning approaches soundly based on first hand experience or practical work dealing with real life issues. Types of provision and examples of effective practice are included. (BF)

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THE SCOTTISH OFFICE
Education Department

Policy, planning and strategic development for

children and young people presenting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

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A Keynote Speech

by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, MP
Minister for Education
Edinburgh, December 1993

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Foreword

A one year project on children and young people presenting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties was started in the autumn of 1993. Sponsored by the Scottish Office Education Department, jointly with the Social Work Services Inspectorate, it was led by an inter-agency team including local authority and Inspectorate personnel.

The overall focus was on policy and strategy. The aims of the project included: a review of the quality and effectiveness of provision in meeting the special educational needs of such young people; an examination of the appropriateness and sufficiency of links with other concerned agencies, with parents and with the young people themselves; the identification of good practice in mainstream education and in specialised day and residential provision for children and young people presenting disturbing behaviours; and the exchange and dissemination of information through a national conference and publication.

The national conference, organised by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, and held in December 1993, brought together representatives of all the agencies involved and was part of the process of consultation and dissemination. One result of the conference was the publication entitled Schooling with care?, *which discusses some of the issues arising from that conference. This speech by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton was a significant input to the conference and its publication alongside the report of the project was widely requested.*

Introduction

Over the last year the media have highlighted a number of instances of extreme aberrant behaviour by school children and young adults. Examples of such behaviour at school and outside school are invariably widely covered in the media, and become a focus of attention. However, commentators frequently expect instant reforms, regardless of how rare the particular occurrence may be, or however complex the social, emotional and behavioural background. Often those demanding reform do not take account of these complexities. Nevertheless, while such demands from commentators can be disconcerting, we must all recognise that the problems, if left, do *not* go away. They have to be addressed, and that is a clear purpose of this conference.

It is of concern to us all that many children and young people have such difficulties and behave in various unsociable ways. One of the central concerns for you as professionals must be to work together to understand and respond to these children sensitively but effectively.

What makes for difficulty is that children react differently. Not all children or young people who present disturbing behaviour do so in the same way, nor are the reasons for their difficulties necessarily similar even when their behaviour is similar.

What does seem to be common is that the majority of children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties harbour very negative feelings about themselves, about their schools, about their communities, and even in some cases about close members of their own families. These negative feelings and behaviour on the part of a child can often be a reaction to the actions or inactions of adults. If the problems experienced by these children are to be tackled, then those charged with their care and education need to guard against their own negative responses.

Now is certainly an appropriate time to have a national project on this topic, and particularly one which is organised to promote inter-agency collaboration, at both a national and local level. I am absolutely certain that the interest this conference has provoked reflects a keenness of agencies to share experiences and to work together to find common solutions.

Types of behaviour

There are many forms of behaviour which cause concern and require attention. Some behaviour we may be familiar with — to a greater or lesser extent through personal experience — such as temper tantrums. But we are also concerned with hyperactivity, with frightened or withdrawal behaviour, bullying, disruptive behaviour in classrooms and in public places, and actions such as peer abuse, stealing and drug abuse.

If children and young people have negative feelings about themselves, and their close contacts, then some respond by even more negative actions. It is vital to try to break the cycle before they withdraw further or indulge in increasingly disturbing antisocial actions, both towards themselves and others.

Education has an important role by providing opportunities for success and promoting positive attitudes and actions, but so have other agencies. The combined effort will be greater than the sum of its parts. Attention has to be given not only to the school but also to the local environment, the home environment, the aspirations and expectations of young people, and to the youth culture some of which is promulgated through social events and the media.

Early intervention

Early intervention is essential, identifying problems as soon as possible and rapidly taking steps towards remediation. I welcome initiatives such as those over recent years by psychologists in Strathclyde and elsewhere providing assistance to nursery staff and parents in coping with the behavioural difficulties of children under the age of five.

Good parenting helps to give children the security that is essential to the development of self-confidence and a strong sense of personal identity. The Open University parenting programmes have proved popular because they give the advice and support young parents feel they need.

We cannot begin too soon. It may seem strange to say that the health and behaviour of the next generation begins in the pri-

mary, secondary and further education of the present generation, but such may be the case.

Health education is an area targeted by the Government for action. In most schools it is delivered as part of a comprehensive programme of personal and social development. This is an important element of the curriculum, but recent research, including by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, which has organised this conference, has highlighted the need for even more specific input on health and personal and social development in school, and particularly in the later stages. The parenting and care programmes within the SCOTVEC modules are increasingly making a contribution — but valuable and significant as they are in the long term, they cannot address directly more immediate needs with children who present disturbing behaviour.

The contribution of school education

Primary teachers already do valuable work in identifying potential difficulties and thus prevent situations which could lead to later problems. They help pupils, and work closely with parents in a wide variety of often difficult circumstances. However, even though extreme situations may be rare, effective ways of dealing with the full range of issues cannot rely upon intuition alone on the part of staff.

They require leadership and policies which promote positive behaviour by pupils. They require advice on effective approaches. Staff need to be able to work with others outwith the school who can support. I commend the action that many authorities have taken to provide such support, through advisory staff, with the assistance of educational psychology services to help with pupils whom teachers initially find difficult to manage. I recognise that in some cases schools are not only supporting pupils but are also helping parents whose own skills are ill-developed.

The Government's 5–14 curriculum programme provides a foundation for effective approaches within schools. The emphasis on basic systems of assessment, recording and reporting, if handled sensitively, provides a working framework for teachers. Pupils' strengths as well as weaknesses can be recognised and reported.

Pupils and parents under stress need positive messages. Parents welcome the assurance of hearing about what is good in the performance of their children, and not just about the difficulties. Too often in the past pupils knew that if a parent was invited to a school it was to hear about problems rather than successes. I am pleased to note that this model is now being replaced.

Most effective schools have discipline policies which encourage and reward positive behaviour. Many school development plans give priority to the prevention of disruption. In doing so they recognise the variety of influences on behaviour — such as the appropriateness of curriculum choice or delivery, the quality of teaching and learning approaches, the attitudes of staff, the value of a developed school ethos, and the extent of effective home–school relationships.

We have worked with education authority staff to provide a wide range of materials and resources to assist in key areas — the development of an appropriate school ethos, the use of development planning and educational audit procedures. I have also supported the production of materials on discipline and against bullying; and these will be followed by packs on truancy.

Key findings from research on *discipline* were that good discipline flows from the ethos of the school. Most effective discipline policies are certainly not soft policies. They have clear firm rules, but the rules are framed in ways which recognise values. Pupils have a range of privileges which they work to retain. For example, in one school, pupils are allowed to come into school on a cold wet morning early, or at breaks, and socialise, and retain these privileges through appropriate behaviour. There is an emphasis on the responsibilities of pupils as well as their rights.

A similarly rigorous approach to *truancy* is essential. Difficulties in learning lead to frustration on the part of pupils, teachers and parents. Where such difficulties are undetected the child is in danger of becoming insecure, bored, disaffected and on the way to becoming a disruption to others and a truant. We cannot underestimate the consequences of truancy. It leads to alienation from the school, to further learning difficulties, and alienation from learning, which can be devastating if it sets the pattern for adult life.

It has become very clear recently that *bullying* is a feature of the problems of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some are the perpetrators, and require to be identified and treated appropriately. Others are the victims and need special assistance. Some are both bully and victim, depending on circumstance, and the boundary between bullying and peer abuse can be a very narrow one.

Scotland has led the way in exploring positive approaches to anti-bullying strategies. Since the initial research, the issue of the first anti-bullying pack and the appointment of the first anti-bullying development officer, there has been a whole new set of joint initiatives in Scotland, from Dumfries to Shetland, involving teachers, pupils, parents, school boards, and a range of local authority agencies.

As we can see, effective partnerships can do much to deal with the problems which arise with pupils who present disturbing behaviour. Many schools already set good examples and promote an appropriate ethos. They encourage respect for pupils and among pupils for each other, and promote personal responsibility. They have sensible firm rules which are clearly understood. They have developed effective classroom management, learning and behavioural support, improved guidance systems, and, through staff development, improved the support for teachers. We need to capitalise on these experiences.

I should like to refer to two new related developments which plan to build on existing good work in regions. We are to fund the production of video material for teachers about children who present disturbing behaviour. This will be part of the follow-up to this conference. In addition, we will be working with regional authorities next session exploring ways of preparing appropriate materials for teachers and others about peer and child abuse. I am sure that you will agree that these are very important initiatives.

Partners in the identification and assessment of problems

I have already underlined how important it is for assessments to be made and for problems to be identified jointly, and as early as possible. In addition to teachers, parents and pupils working

together, other professionals have equally important roles. These include educational psychologists, social workers, youth workers, members of panels and health professionals. A disruptive child in a classroom, a child with severe emotional difficulties, a shoplifting child, a child from an unhappy home or in care, and a child with untapped potential, may all be the same person.

Each professional has to assess a child's difficulties from his or her own standpoint, within the school, within the family and within the community, and look at the strengths. Then they should jointly set out the steps to be taken to overcome or at least alleviate the problems.

The recent report by the Chief Inspector of Social Work has considered the needs of children and young people in residential care, and identifies the importance of thorough approaches to assessment. Recent work on the education of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties within the 5–14 programme has shown just how important it is to assess strengths and difficulties as a first step to planning and implementing an educational programme. This is vital if it is going to reward achievement and encourage young people to take pride in what they have attained in completing courses. Without clear assessments, educational progress is difficult to detect; and recognition of educational progress is important if problems which stem from frustration and negative attitudes are to be avoided.

Types of provision

Assessing children's needs is not easy; neither is the process of choosing appropriate placements. It is important to have regional strategies which make effective use of multi-disciplinary assessments, but as was pointed out in the report *Another Kind of Home*, interprofessional rivalries and misunderstandings can sometimes stand in the way of progress. All professionals have a duty to set examples of positive attitudes and behaviours.

These points are underlined in the White Paper *Scotland's Children*. It identifies key principles which require to be taken into account in looking after any child or young person. They include features such as:

- Children have the right to be treated as individuals, and young people and children with their parents should be made aware of their rights, but also of their responsibilities.

- The children and young people should be actively encouraged in all aspects of their education and training. Their individual educational needs should be identified and met. Through child-centred collaboration they should be able to rely upon a high quality of interdisciplinary teamwork among the adults providing for their care, education and health needs. Care should also be provided in partnership with parents, wherever this is in the interest of the child.

By no means all the requirements of children with such special educational needs can be addressed in main stream classes. For some children special facilities are required outwith these, through team operations in on-site units, residential care or special schools. And for a very small number of pupils, secure accommodation is necessary to protect both themselves and others.

I am aware of the debate which is going on elsewhere about provision for these few children who present challenging behaviour. In Scotland the Social Work Services Group are currently reviewing the role and use of secure accommodation and their report will be published next year. These units have a particularly difficult task. They are concerned to respond to the emotional needs of the young person and at the same time to try to find effective ways of changing their offending behaviour. These important complex tasks need tackling through a coordinated approach involving care staff, teachers, psychiatrist, psychologist and the general practitioner, and parents. In other words through a real partnership before, during and after secure care.

Examples of effective practice

I now turn to examples of effective practice and would start by commending education authorities for the imaginative and energetic ways in which they have developed and mounted large scale collaborative projects. Some of these are well established. The 'Young People in Trouble' programme in Strathclyde, the

Tayside 'Strategy for Young People', and 'The Youth Strategy' in Lothian are widely quoted.

I understand that in Central region, the innovative Lecropt project which includes intensive family work was a joint project with Barnados, as was a similar exercise in Lothian. I commend such collaborative developments between regional authorities and voluntary organisations. Keeping children out of residential care can assist in keeping families together.

I welcome similar initiatives as in Grampian to explore and evaluate different methods of working. I understand that some of these using teams of teachers and other professionals have achieved significant results. When I spoke in Dundee in May 1993 I underlined the belief in Scotland that a range of types of educational provision was appropriate for children with special needs. A range of provision allows us to respond positively to circumstances.

This conference is at the midpoint of a one year project which the Government has funded to focus on good effective and efficient practice - by reviewing existing work, and by identifying ways of promoting that practice. Some significant work is being reported here. I am grateful to those in local authorities and other organisations, including 'Who Cares?', who have given time to the conference.

Educational implications

This brings me to what is probably the key question for consideration in this conference. How can education meet some of the very challenging needs that are exhibited by the young people who are the focus of this conference?

We cannot pretend that it is easy capturing and retaining the attention of pupils who have severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. At times it is tempting to say that it cannot be done. That is not acceptable. Walking by on the other side is not assisting anyone, least of all the children and young people. Effective education is essential.

Within schools these pupils require a curriculum which is broad and is seen by them to be relevant — if not always immediately

interesting. It requires effective teaching and learning approaches soundly based on first hand experience or practical work dealing with real life issues.

Teachers should not be defensive about the importance of education. Some of the 'older' young people in secure accommodation have been overheard telling their younger colleagues to 'stick in at school ... don't give up too soon'.

Let us not forget that progress in education is itself therapeutic. How can we ensure, through effective partnerships, that some of our most vulnerable children, in particular those in care, can receive adequate education?

Success can feed success. But unless there is a good system of communicating information about children's strengths and needs between institutions, the opportunities for progress in their education and training will be limited. If, for example, children or young people are placed in units for relatively short periods of time then, without effective knowledge of their educational needs, much work will be counterproductive.

When a pupil returns to mainstream school after a period on a separate programme, previous negative attitudes to school could be reinforced unless careful steps are taken to ensure that school staff, the young person, and other pupils are appropriately prepared. How are joint agency teams ensuring effective communication and smooth transition?

This initiative and the conference focuses on pupils who present disturbing behaviour. But by its very nature it can impact on the development of all children and young people.

Success will only be achieved by effective and efficient cooperation and partnership.

Further reading

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Scottish Office (1993). *Scotland's children: proposals for child care policy and law.* Edinburgh: HMSO.

Social Work Services Inspectorate for Scotland (1992). *Another kind of home: a review of residential child care.* Edinburgh :HMSO.

Further copies of this publication or of the conference publication, *Schooling with care?*, can be obtained free of charge by writing to: the RIU Dissemination Officer, The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR.

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'If children and young people have negative feelings about themselves, and their close contacts, then some respond by even more negative actions. It is vital to break the cycle'

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